

# HOUSE CAREAX

Passage into Horror

Horror  
Convention

New  
Fiction

The  
Armchair  
Critic

Movie  
And  
Book  
Reviews

Trivia  
Quiz

And  
Much  
More . . .



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## House Cartax-

**GREETINGS, O Children of the Night,  
Wanderers of the Darkness! Velcome to HOUSE  
CARFAX. Enter freely, and of your own will.**

*But once the castle gates creak shut behind you,  
do not turn to look back. Swallow the tears in your  
throat, and wipe the clamminess from your cold palms.*

*For the walkway in will be lost to eerie mist,  
familiar landmarks swathed in sinister shadows . . . and  
there is not pathway out.*

*Come, lonely heart! Drink with us! Toast  
our bloody offerings, feast upon our carcasses of fear!  
We, the Keepers of the House, reach with mutilated  
hand, to guide--to touch you--down the dark and  
dangerous twistings of our craft . . . your own feeble mind  
. . . your poor, your vulnerable will.*

*Come . . . hear the whisperings? Remember, there is no  
retreat. Let us take you . . .*

## Blood, Sweat and Jeers

### HC at the Los Angeles Horror Convention

by Joan C. Schramm

You say you love horror conventions but hate high admission prices, cramped dealers rooms and limited hours? Then, my friend, you'd have a great love-hate relationship with the 1988 Fangoria Convention that was held in Los Angeles April 8 - 9.

Admission for each day was \$18.50, with the Fangoria definition of a day as 11 AM to 7 PM. Not only were attendees grumbling about the short hours, but some dealers joined in. They complained about the small room size, smaller than promised, some claimed. And it seems that most other conventions closed the dealers' room at 7 PM, but continued with movies, talks, demos, etc. through the evening - sometimes past midnight. At this convention, it was curtains at 7 PM for everyone.

The dealers' room - one small room, with just one dealer specializing in horror fiction - was a pickpocket's dream. From 11 AM to late afternoon, both days, it was wall-to-wall bodies, hot air and sweat. A dealer selling Arid Extra Dry would have made millions. Buy it while standing in line to flip through tons of movie stills.

If all that sweat was OK with you, then you might've found much to oogle - tables of comics, movie stills, movie posters (some classics, and expensive), videos of upcoming movies playing very loud - over and over and over again, and of course the make-up tables. They were brimming with prosthetics used in Fright Night II, giant bats, disfigured heads with movable features, and worst (or best) of all, a table selling sliced ears, arms, protruding bones, gashes, all for sale by a company that makes quickie slasher videos - for sale, too, right next to the gouged eyes.

Talks and demos by such F/Xers as Richard Miranda, Bart Mixon, Gene Warren, Brian Moore, and Bob Keen studded the program. But the highlight of the make-up fest was an appearance by the Gore Master Himself - Tom Savini. The Ace not only gave lectures and demos of his gore skills, but also stayed for questions and autographs, much to his credit.

Can't say the same for Tony Perkins and Robert Englund, though. Sorry, but unlike most other notables there (Barker, Savini, Roddy McDowell, Romero, Tobe Hooper, Joe Dante) our ole' friends Norman and Freddy were hit and run. Quick to say that each generously packed his talk with movie news, acting notes, and audience Q&A - very satisfying while it lasted.

But with Perkins, for instance, at the close of his talk, he leaped from the stage with a wave of his hand and his raincoat tails, quickly declined offered pens, and ran - ponytail flying. Norman in a ponytail. Sorry, but it's true. Why wouldn't he give autographs? Rumor was that his contract wouldn't allow it, because he'd just finished signing some dealer's movie stills at the



convention, stills that then went on sale for \$5.

But Director Joe Dante (**HOWLING, INnersPACE, GREMLINS, TWILIGHT ZONE**) not only gave his scheduled talk for the fans, he seemed like a fan himself. Dressed in sneakers and a suit, he stayed not only to answer questions (he had an answer for any question, no matter how stupid!) but to ogle and buy with the rest of us. He said he was there to mingle, not to be admired.

For literary bugs hoping for a rare Arkham House, or even an early Kirby McCauley edited story collection, sorry folks. The sole book dealer only sold new Barker and King, and a 20-year-old **STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES** magazine with one of Stephen King's first published stories - for a cool \$125. Talk about slim pickins.

But if you didn't feel like paying \$75 - \$200 for Barker and King, you could shoot the breeze for the price of admission with the friendly Clive on Sunday. He began his talk at 2:00 and generously stayed until way past 4:00 PM.

Movies ran all through the Convention activities: **BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN, NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, NIGHT STALKER, TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE**, Corman's **LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS** (with Dick Miller - the very familiar face in so many horror movies), **PIRANHA**, among others. But like so many fan conventions, all movies ran at the same time as talks, and everything was packed into non-stop eight-hour space on Saturday and Sunday.

As if that weren't enough examples of bad planning, catch this:

Right in the middle of a surprisingly dull "Special Presentation" panel with George Romero and Tobe Hooper, hosted with Gestapo discipline by Hooper's publicist Scot Holton, up pops this stranger who grabs the mike and makes a very long speech about someone "we all love and appreciate."

Why didn't someone stop this joker? Because it's his birthday! Whose? Scot Holton, of course. And no one stops him because it's a setup. On the que announcing his publicist's name, Tobe Hooper gets up and awkwardly reads a prepared speech on how great this guy is. All this to a captive audience of over 500 fans who've come to see and hear about horror, and not to listen to Fangoria Convention organizers serenade a behind-the-scenes administrator with "Happy Birthday."

We're sure the guy deserved the world, but not on our time, with George Romero, and authors Gary Brandner and John Russo, sitting there with their thoughts interrupted by something totally irrelevant.

Adding insult to injury, a giant birthday cake was uncovered and displayed in front of and in full view of the audience. Pieces were given to those on the panel, but no recognition, much less invitation, was given to the audience. Not only did Fangoria organizers have no sense of timing, they had no class, either.

One last shot - Ever overhear something that tested the bounds of reality? That made you think, Did I really hear that? Well, HC overheard something like that at the Convention:

Teen Girl to Teen Guy: Oooh, where'd ya get that t-shirt?

Teen Guy: (referring proudly to his Jason - Friday 13th Part 6 iron-on) At

that dealer's table over there. Do ya like Jason?

Teen Girl: Oooh, yeah. I love him.

Teen Guy: Yeah. Me too.

Now that's scary.

by Joan C. Schramm  
with contributions from  
P. Infantino, and J. Lopez

## MOVIE REVIEWS . . . AND REFUSE

by Janadale Sylve-Wickersham

### BEETLEJUICE

This movie is full of tricks, the biggest one being the use of the character's name as title to mislead viewers into believing Beetlejuice is the central focus of the movie. He isn't. And too bad, because the script could've used some humor, even Michael Keaton's frantic, devilish style.

This story is about a couple who die, and become captive ghosts in their own house, which is then taken over by an eccentric family of humans. This new family will not be frightened off despite the honest efforts at haunting by ghost spouses Geena Davis and Alec Baldwin. The zaniness becomes exhausting to the point of boredom, and--alas! the most dreadful of all plights to befall a cinematic undertaking--predictable. There are few redeeming moments:

The death-obsessed daughter of the couple moving in becomes the communications link between the ghosts and her self-centered parents. We are never quite sure why this apathetic teenager with dark circles under her eyes is the only one who can see the ghosts.

And if the afterlife is anything at all like the arena purported in this movie, the dead should find their prior lifetime of training more than adequate to deal with the bureaucracy, redtape, and long lines of the hereafter.

Otherwise, you aren't missing much. There is no focus on nor explanation at all about the intriguing name-referent to Orion's bright-red star; and the "afterlife world" we are set up to believe in (for the sake of this movie, anyway) cannot sustain its own excesses, much less demand that we suspend our disbeliefs. See it if you have to, but don't say you weren't warned.



## RANTINGS ON THE SEVENTH SIGN

By Janadale Sylve-Wickersham

**NOTE:** *This review is for people who have already seen **THE SEVENTH SIGN**. Read this review only if you don't mind having the plot revealed for you. For you who have already been gypped, send in your comments. Our warm welcome of your remarks may be your only solace.*

FIRST OF ALL, anyone who makes a movie with a number in its title oughta be able to at least count, agreed? Now watch, here we go:

- The dying fish on the coast of Haiti, 1.
- The frozen-over city in the Middle Eastern desert, 2.
- The bloodied bodies in South American jungle waters, 3.
- The "earthquake" (mild that it was) caused by our intrepid intruder herself snooping through her housemate's room, 4.
- The senseless church scene in which our hero? villian? deliberately cracks a seal and sends a drippy Ms. Moore into-- what? throes of possible miscarriage? cramps brought on by indigestion? intensely bad gas?--5.
- The hailing sky on an impossibly clear day, 6.
- The eclipse, 7.
- The execution of a religious convicted murderer, 8.

WHOA! Wait a minute! What has eight signs and warns you to come to a screeching halt? Exactly. Someone should have STOPPED (or at least put the brakes on) this blatant miscalculation of a movie. But enough nitpicking; let's talk about the *real* flaws in the movie, things like:

- o The unscrupulous junkpiling of Jewish lore, "interpreted" Biblical prophecy, and outright fairytaling into one unbelievable crapheap of story thread too weak to hang by its own rules.
- o The red herrings that lead so far off the track, not even *they* can find their way back (the obvious 'opposite-slanting' of bad guy and good guy).
- o The nagging *stupid* little inconsistencies typical of cinematic mishaps that assume the masses will gullibly *accept* such weaknesses as--don't spill your popcorn, now--enterTAINment.

**THE SEVENTH SIGN** combines, and confuse,--elements from the Talmud, the Bible, and religious folklore to fulfill ancient prophecies of an apocalyptic world end . . . improbably prevented by an emotionally troubled mother-to-be . . . who heroically scrambles to halt the supposedly inevitable, catastrophic and on- rushing SEVEN SIGNS from occurring . . . in order to save the life of her unborn child. You follow so far?



Oh yes, almost forgot: once the Seventh Sign occurs, the Hall of Guf (?), where newborn souls float around waiting to be assigned name and number, will be all *souled* out. What's so bad about this? We are never told, so of course we don't care, but the implication is that this shrinking soul supply spells eternal doom for everyone.

Aside from battling natural elements such as rain, hail, earthquakes, and bouts of suicidal temptation, Demi Moore must also contend with a most pessimistic and sinister reincarnated Christ who walks around crumbling mysterious wax seals of disaster over selected geographical hotspots; a reincarnated bad guy who, for all his thousands of years of wandering the earth boning up on mystical trivia, ends up in some dim library picking the brains of pregnant lady DM, supposedly a novice to all this (we find out later her karma is catching up to her in a BIG way); and she's even up against bullyish church doormen who will let into the sanctuary a character as crafty and suspicious-looking as any but deny entry to a poor pregnant woman coming in from a merciless, relentless, torrent of a storm.

And now, a reverent paragraph devoted to those nagging *stupid* little inconsistencies: How did Good Guy and Bad Guy, from across the world and nations away, both just happen to be "led" to our heroic California native--coincidentally, around the same time frame? Would a woman eight months full of near-term baby get out of her car in an absolute downpour, and actually RUN, teetering and skating on slippery sidewalks, to chase after some Bozo who ignores her just so she can insist on giving him a *ride*? Is it really plausible that with women giving birth planet-wide, 'round the clock, Demi Moore's child is the ONNNLY one who will be born on this certain day (February 22) at this certain time and she is therefore, by default nomination, the ONNNLY one who has incentive to save the world? Wouldn't all those other mothers be hysterically and savagely fighting to save *their* Pisces infants, too? Or weren't our reincarnated pals, er, "led" to them? The Heavenly Labor Board might be tempted to turn God in for discrimination, I think.

Now to the crowning faux pas. Throughout the movie, it has been made perfectly clear that this whole contest boils down to one thing: stopping that last sign from happening. The law was inviolable: if the criminal dies, the whole world is done for. And what happens? The religious criminal IS executed, his blood is spilled all over the floor of that execution room . . . and then a *miracle* fixes everything. Did YOU hear the Good Guy stick in a clause that if the convict were *shot* instead of gassed, mankind might stand a chance? Did I miss some obscure line that hinted Demi's dying in childbirth might revoke the odds? NO! JC himself said there was no way. Which means not a single one of the "portentous" events in this movie mattered. Demi Moore might as well have kicked back for the two-hour duration, watched JC run around breaking his seals like communion crackers, stuffed herself on pickles and ice cream, let the inbred retard go to the gas chamber, and then popped up in the final scene for her deathbed act--and the results would have been the same. It's easier to believe Popeye could've saved us all with a simple can of spinach.



## LOVE GROWS

Fiction by Joan Schramm

Oh God, he's here.

Her wide eyes stared across the counter at the slender, dark-haired boy leaning casually on a pile of books on display a few feet from her. Marcy had just checked out a customer, closed the cash register and now, of all times, had nothing to do. Her stomach knotted up, as it always did when he was around.

Jees, he's so cool it hurts.

Her throat tightened again, and sharp, hot flames burned in her mid-section, spreading up into her chest, meeting the tightness at her throat. The flames spread down into her pelvis, still hot, but now fluttering like all those other times - lower, slowly but definitely floating down, settling between her legs, pulsing like butterfly wings at rest.

It's only 'cause I haven't seen him in so long, she thought. Maybe if I don't think about him so much... when I don't see him I always know what to say. If I concentrate real hard when I do see him, then I'll be able to....to....yeah, if pigs had wings.

"Hey. Hi, Marcy. I thought you were off Wednesdays. What a surprise."

His voice held no sarcasm; he really hadn't planned to see her. Damn.

"Off Thursdays and Fridays."

She threw him the line coolly as she swished passed, grabbing a note pad and pen pretending to look for a title down the nearest aisle. Then, over her shoulder, she absently called,

"So whadya need?"

Shove it down. Kill that animal. Take deep breaths. Don't show it. Does it show?

"That book on backpacking. Should be out. You guys got it yet?"

He started to walk after her, his long strides bringing him so close so quickly. She thought fast, and still had room to hurry past him, back to the register, secure in the knowledge that she couldn't jump him from behind the counter. And if she couldn't, she wouldn't.

"Well, we gotta look it up."

She looked around for that gigantic reference on new books, and found it at the edge of the counter, where customers would have easy access to it. How considerate of management, Marcy thought cynically.

OK. Think of something to keep the hands busy; gotta hide the shaking.

"Should be in here."

She grabbed a corner of the heavy book and pulled it around to her. The book was heavy. She was grateful for its weight. And the counter



emphasized the subtle demarcation of customer/salesperson; he was forced to read upside down. And the advantage made her feel more secure. She was on her own territory.

She followed book titles down the page as he bent over, gently bumping his head on hers, following her finger with his eyes.

Oh God, don't look up. I'll turn to stone. He's breathing on my hand.

Her neck muscles strained as her throat choked up again. (Like something pushing to get out from her insides.)

OK, don't show it. He'll think you're a jerk. Stay loose. Once you look up at him you'll never look away. Keep it down.

Keep what down? she thought. Her head, still bent over the reference book? Or that stuff inside her stomach that made it feel like a garbage disposal? She wondered if that's what being pregnant felt like.

"Here it is," she said evenly.

She looked up on her last words, so involved with her inner agitation that she forgot her own warning not to. But he wasn't there. Ignoring a waiting customer, she quickly turned to walk from behind the counter to find him, when she smacked into him coming the other way, her nose smashing into his sweater. His chest felt like a blackboard.

Her face was paralyzed in a mask of controlled blandness.

He looked down at her, just as surprised as she. Not moving, he smiled easily, and said in a voice only she could hear,

"Hi."

"Hi yourself. Your book'll be out next month."

"What book?"

Her stomach knotted up again, feeling like she had just swallowed lead. His question broke the spell, and she was able to look away. She desperately tried to think of the title, or at least the subject.

"You know, that book you wanted." (Or have you forgotten too?)

The knot felt like it had grown twice its size. She quickly looked down at her stomach, half expecting to see it expand. But, of course, no.

She had to get out of there, before all her pent-up feelings for Scott burst through her gut.

"Shit! I'm late for class. See ya."

He quickly looked at her for some response. He found none, and left on silent sneakers.

\*\*\*\*\*

"We got any peanut butter left? I'm starved."

She had bounded home on Hermes heels, buoyant with the glow left from seeing Scott, and relieved that the knot was gone. It always left when he did - and came back when he did.

Boy, nerves can sure screw up your insides, she mused.

"Hey, mom, where's the pea - never mind, I got it."

With the bread sack in one hand, a spoon and jar of peanut butter in the other, Marcy swung the refrigerator door shut with her foot and sat down at the kitchen table. The late afternoon sun felt good against her back as she

unscrewed the lid and scooped out a generous dollop.

The comfort of the warm sun and peanut butter-her favorite food-lulled her into thinking about Scott. Forgetting the bread, she nibbled slowly on the peanut butter, her thoughts focused on the bookstore scene hours before. She had already memorized it, and was now replaying it in her mind.

Control, she thought bitterly.

In the head, people always act the way you want them to, with everything always under control-your control. But real life was so - messy. You plan, hope, you try to control so hard, then he walks away and doesn't even know. Or worse, you don't control yourself, and come off looking like a jerk.

Well, at least my stomach's OK now, she thought, as she noticed the thin layer of peanut butter left over from licking the spoon.

She was about to dip the spoon in again when the phone rang. It's shrill intensity seemed to split the air as well as her daydream.

She plopped the spoon into the jar and rose from the table, reluctant to leave the site of such pleasant thoughts.

"Hullo," she said dully. Nothing could possibly be more interesting than Scott.

She paused, listening, and whirled around, the phone cord embracing her shoulders like arms.

"Who?" she asked, knowing damn well who.

"Oh, yeah. Scott."

She managed to drain her voice of all revealing inflection. "So what's new? You make your class OK?" She hoped she didn't sound too concerned. Or that he wouldn't notice her good memory.

As that voice-his voice-spoke just to her, so close to her real thoughts (keep it down, keep it down), her stomach cramped again, rumbling, churning with those painful rolling waves that seemed to lie in wait for - what? - to set them off.

She bent over the counter, not hearing his words, in love with his voice. Her arm was around her mid-section as he rambled on about school, and backpacking.

"So how 'bout a movie tonight?" His words cut through her.

"Wha-what?" she asked, partly because the pain had truly distracted her, partly because she didn't fully believe he had asked her, and, if he did, she wanted to hear it again. And again. And again.

"A movie - tonight - us - you and me. Earth calling Marcy - any survivors?"

"I'm here, I'm here funny man."

And so, they went.

The evening reminded Marcy of those first few lines of the old R&R song "Staggerlee."

"The night was clear, the moon was yellow, and the leaves came tumbling down."

You jerk, she chided herself. You're thinking rock and roll on a night you've been dreaming of for three months.

It really was a dream night. They never made it to the movie. Scott said he had to make a delivery for his mom. She was a seamstress, and had just



finished a graduation dress. Marcy thought that was a lame excuse to get them up on the hill, but he did have this big box in the back seat, and an older woman did come to the door and greet him noisily when she took the box.

In the car, on the way down the hill, they'd pretended to talk each other into taking a walk in the warm night air. They had parked on a side road some ways down the hill, and Marcy was silently thankful for no more seat belt biting into her aching stomach at that odd angle.

Maybe a walk, with deep breaths, would help her stomach, she hoped, as she and Scott unfolded themselves out of the small car. The familiar pains had started again when he had first picked her up. Almost as though she were allergic to him, she thought bitterly.

It had grown worse in the car. The more uninvolved she had tried to sound, the tighter her stomach knotted up, feeling like a snake encircling her intestines. By the time they were out of the car, and walking, the snake had coiled and settled in the low pit of her stomach, now producing a dull, heavy ache.

"Hey Scotty, let's sit down for a few minutes."

The playful name came out very naturally, surprising Marcy. She was also pleased that Scott didn't seem to mind, either.

The snake rested.

"It's not too dusty here," she said as they stopped in a small clearing of grass and leaves, lit by the moonlight. As she lowered herself to the ground, she noticed the bright moon peering between a leafy tree branch like a playful child.

Perfect, she mused silently, and sighed deeply. Then, to her surprise, Scott said softly,

"Yeah, it is perfect, isn't it?"

He was sitting beside her. Then his arm was around her shoulders, and before she could plan her next move, she felt herself go backwards slowly to the grass, and his body was resting on hers full length. Through her dream-like state, she noticed that he felt heavier than his slender frame seemed to suggest. As fingers massaged her head, and played with her hair, she closed her eyes.

But why did he feel so heavy? Her stomach - no pain down there any more. Just moving waves inside.....

No matter. No more pretending. No more cool.

He stopped kissing her throat as she began to mumble "No more, no more..."

"No more? Marcy, no more?" he asked jokingly, looking into her upturned face.

"What babe?" she asked dreamily.

"You said no more - No more?" he asked in a comically exaggerated tone.

She laughed aloud, pulling him down.

"Yes more, yes more, yes more" faster and faster until the two words ran together and were stopped by his mouth.

As her body undulated under his, her whole being seemed to spring loose with this new-found freedom to finally show Scott how she felt.

Her legs twined around his as the weight in her stomach suddenly lifted by itself. What relief at last!

But now her chest felt heavy, and she slowly gasped for air, Scott falling deeper into her encircling passion. He closed his eyes, and the night smell of the grass, her hair, her sweat, instantly re-defined his world. His lips found hers again.

She opened her mouth to him, in time to accept his eager tongue. Suddenly he jerked backwards with a sharp, high-pitched cry.

"What was - ?" He looked down at her shadowed face for an answer that never came.

She was moaning with passion, her head rocking back, her mouth open to welcome him. She tried to ignore the growing pressure that seemed to be traveling upwards into her throat. She began to moan the sibilant of his name, but his sudden movement startled her eyes open.

At that same moment, her teeth came down gently on something moving, and her bottom lip felt heavy with a wide, slimy weight that seemed to glide slowly and easily over her tongue, its mass pulsating against the insides of her cheeks.

She tried to scream, not knowing why, but her throat was somehow all clogged up.

Her wide eyes, their pupils dancing in the whites, saw Scott's face contort in a grotesque mask of disgust, like a kid swallowing very strong medicine. He watched, hypnotized, as a long, fat, glistening grey bug slithered out of Marcy's gaping mouth, its wide, knobby head waving antennae from side to side as though it were rejoicing in its own birth.

Marcy gagged in a desperate attempt to spit, but the vile insect was too big, and too reluctant to leave its human cocoon.

In sympathy, or just revulsion, Scott made a hollow-throated sound and doubled over, grabbing his stomach as he vomited under the tree. He turned back in time to witness the shiny, multi-legged creature finally drop from her gaping mouth. As the moonlight caught its oily back, and the night air dried its papery wings, the grotesque insect flew into the leaves, above the trees, to freedom.

Scott looked back at Marcy, who still sat stiffly on the leafy grass. He saw - or thought he saw - antennae re-appearing. The same knobby head and waving...

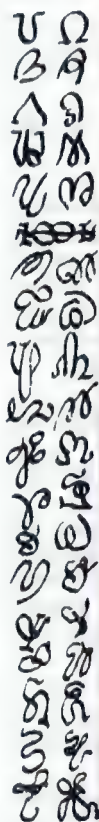
Her shock didn't block out the sound of his screams fading into the growl of the engine, nor the screeching of tires and the engine fading into the distance.

And her shock didn't block out the feeling still in her mouth of smooth belly flesh pushing up from her throat, gagging her. Or rows of bristly moving nubs padding down her tongue, pushing out her lower lip, stretching the sides of her mouth.

But then her renewed screams blocked out any thought of her stomach. She didn't even notice that the pain was gone.



**WHAT KIND OF DAY WILL IT BE  
(WHEN YOU DIE)?**



Will happy kites sail gaily  
on a blustery seacoast breeze?  
Will seagulls tilt their glider wings  
--airborne high with ease?  
Will waves sing and foam thier ocean song  
with sunlight-dappled tease--

on the day you die?

Perhaps you've never wondered  
if the cold fall moon will stand still;  
If the night will wail its grief  
on the notes of whipperwills;  
If shadows will hide, weeping  
among the stealth of darkened hills--

on the night you die.

Will the fatal evening fall  
on a yearning sunset scape?  
Will twilight haze afflicting  
throw its fog-soaked brooding cape;  
To smother needy land?  
with its blood-stained mouth agape--

Do you fear that you will suffer on the day you die?

Or will it be at dawn  
in the stillness after night;  
When murders have been wrought  
by manly beasts who hide from light.  
Will silence steal your breath  
while you plead your spirit's rights--

Will you die a death, reeking, foul, and unknown for days?

Perhaps a storm will rise,  
angry screams of rain, wind-driven;  
Blowing leaves, breaking windows,  
venting fury under heaven;  
Rending trees with lightning strokes  
until your desolate life is given--

**Will you die in the warm company of friends . . .  
shrinking from the touch of your withered hand?**

Lonely--loved; well-kept--alone;  
we could speak of all the ways--  
But for a frightful, dis-eased moment,  
let's just imagine all the days.

All the days that you could die!  
O, let's examine this together:  
Why, it could be today, dear friend!  
So, tell me . . . how's the weather?

Janadale Sylve-Wickersham

## THE ARTCHAIR CRITIC



I haven't even finished writing my last paragraph for issue two and already I'm pleading for forgiveness.

I'm thrilled that some readers took the time to write us to express their feelings about this column. With your help and my continued dedication, I'm looking forward to a promising and rewarding career in horror journalism. Instead of throwing in the literary towel, I'm going to keep those reviews coming at a fever clip.

But first, a letter from Raymond Willets of south San Jose, who wrote:

"What a joke. I took a chance on your group's first issue from a well-respected book shop's recommendation. Seemed pretty decent until I got to your piece. A 4.2 for Hellraiser is ridiculous. Granted, the acting wasn't up to Academy Award standards, but who ever wins an Oscar for 'Best Actor' in horror pictures? I think Clive did a halfway respectable job considering it was his first motion picture effort. That's a lot more than I can say for your first effort at being a so-called 'self-proclaimed critic'."

Sorry you didn't agree with my comments on Hellraiser, Ray, but you may find my current reviews a little more interesting.

So much for pre-game warmup. Let's get on with the serious business of reviewing.

A motion picture that didn't last long at the major theatres was **THE SERPENT AND THE RAINBOW**. If you haven't yet caught this sleeper, try your favorite video store and give it a look. A healthy dash of Haitian voodoo, some freshly prepared Romero zombie bitters, tossed together with an ample portion of Rastaman bongo drum beating all combine to offer the viewer a generous helping of life in the dead lane.

Philip Allen, a young scientific researcher, has acquired a mysterious self-protecting power that enables him to escape the treacherous jungle of the Amazon Valley. No sooner does he touch American soil than he finds himself accepting an invitation to Haiti.

His mission is to seek out the secret ingredients of an extremely powerful powder that causes a perfectly normal human being to lose all visible and medical signs of life. The company that hires him hopes to use this drug as an anesthetic for patients undergoing major surgery.

Philip's first stop in Haiti is the local clinic. There he meets a beautiful Haitian doctor named Marielle Dushant. Together, they set out to the village cemetery in hopes of interviewing Louis Mozart, a native who has recently surfaced after supposedly being dead and buried for the last few years.



However, a certain bad cop named Captain Petraude seems hell-bent on creating problems for Dr. Allen. The remaining sixty minutes takes you from a gripping torture session to a tender love scene that had me yearning for the good life. Plenty of good special effects and a constantly moving plot round out this picture. The biggest complaint was the difficulty in understanding the rapid-fire Haitian dialect. However, it did give this film a down-to-earth, realistic flavor.

Total Score: \*\*\*

On a further note, have you ever started reading an extremely long novel and had difficulty finishing it? I'm dragging on page 540 of Stephen King's *IT*, and already I can see that I'm in for a long, long haul.

In the meantime, I grabbed a quick read and would like to share it with you. If you're looking for a break and some great entertainment, pick up a selection from Tor Books titled **THE HUNT**, by James Howard Kunsler. Printed in large bold print and stretched out to a grand total of 217 pages, I had such a good time, I overlooked the author's attempt at convincing me that this novel was a serious horror effort, and not a slapstick comedy.

Billy Nichols has revenge on his mind when he invites his former college pal, R.J. Traveal, to help hunt down and capture the elusive bigfoot in the rugged Trinity Alps. Seems young Billy never forgave his old roommate for stealing his girlfriend Diana and eventually marrying her.

In the years that ensued, Nichols has managed to lose control and suffer a mental breakdown costing him a few days at the local funny farm.

Against Diana's wishes, R.J. decides to accept the challenge and humor his buddy, while temporarily escaping the clutches of his wife for a few days.

This is where the laughs begin as Traveal and Nichols meet an old hillbilly hick named Cleon Tapper and attempt to rent some horses and a packing mule. Tapper finally agrees to sell the pair a group of horses and a mule for a healthy sum. The old fellow has quite a sense of humor as he plants fake footprints around the boys' cabin and even goes so far as to don a genuine bigfoot costume. His attempt at trying to put a scare into these two city slickers backfires as Traveal fires a few gunshots and has old Cleon bumping into trees and generally making a nuisance of himself.

Convinced that Tapper has given up and gone home, the two head further into the darkness of the haunting forest and this is where things begin to get hairy.

I won't go into any more detail, as by now you should be looking for this novel at your favorite bookstore. See if you don't agree that Mr. Kunsler provides a great escape from the monotonous life we are sometimes confronted with.

Final Score: \*\*

The Armchair Critic is Joe Lopez

## CARCASS

Do you remember the thing we saw, dear soul, on that gentle summer morning? At a bend of the path a vile carcass on a pebbly river bed, its legs in the air like a lustful woman, consumed and exuding poisons, exposed in careless, shameless fashion, its belly filled with effluvia. The sun shone on this corruption, as though to cook it to a turn, and to give back to Nature all she had joined together. And the sky saw how the haughty carcass blossomed out like a flower. The stench was so overpowering, you thought that you would faint on the grass. The flies kept buzzing over the decaying belly from which there emerged black regiments of larvae that flowed like dense liquid along these living rags.

All this sank and rose again like a wave, or shot upwards, crackling; the body might have been thought to live, swollen with an uncertain breath, and to multiply. And this world emitted a strange music, as of running water and of wind, or the grain that a winnower in a rhythmic action shakes and turns in his sieve.

The shapes were dissolving and were no more than a dream, an outline that comes slowly on the forgotten canvas, and that the artist finishes only from memory.

Behind the rocks an uneasy bitch looked at us with an angry eye, waiting for the moment to seize once again the portion of the skeleton she had dropped.

And yet you, too, will come to be like this filth, this ghastly infection, star of my eyes, my Nature's sun, you, my angel and my passion! Yes, such you will be, oh, queen of all graces, after the last rites, when you go, beneath grass and luxuriant vegetation, to molder amid the bones. Then, my beauty! Tell the vermin that will eat you with kisses that I have preserved the shape and the divine essence of my decayed love!

--Charles Baudelaire (1857)



## Come, Ye Faithful One

Fiction by Janadale Sylve-Wickersham

There used to be nine of us: Mathilde, the wealthy New Orleans-bred Creole who forced us to correctly pronounce her name in the French fashion, mahTEEL'd; Ramona, an East Coaster whose remarkable talent for drama had found its way into low budget horror films; Italian brothers Pietro and Giuseppe, the latter of whom ran a multitude of small press publications specializing in the horror genre; the reclusive young artist Tomas, whose savage features and waist-length mane had done as much to capture attention in the art community as had his fantastic creations of art; the soft-spoken spoken Jacob, a most unorthodox Mormon, as evidenced by his fascinated presence in our club; Brooks, the gentle Black writer whose books of supernatural beings had won acclaim in six countries. And of course, Asian-born Runningvomitt, or RV, who owned a chain of comic bookstores across the country. Insisting with juvenile delight upon this disgusting allonym, Runningvomit refused to tell us his real name. He did not believe in the past, in any history, in fact that had occurred before his birth.

And then, myself, yes. The youngest of those ancients remaining, the prophetess who had hoped, within this nurturing circle, to resurrect the strains of her race. They thought me sixteen, gracious, talented, bright and mature for my age. I was lucky to find them. Within their meeting walls, in the lovely home of Mathilde, I needed no disguise. I came pale, dark curly head unbound, black cape snuggled about my shoulders. They applauded in praise, delighting in my affinity for . . . effect. I was safe, exhilarated, and my hopes ran high.

Oh, the warm times in that estate of Mathilde's, the location remote, the grounds exquisite, the property itself nestled high in the shadowy hills of Almaden. Every other Friday we collected there to revel in our craft, in the twilight of evenings until the moon ran high in the heavens near dawn. The laughter, the story-tellings, the tinkling of glasses as we toasted with strange libations. Some of us brought passages to read, intoning their eerie lines by the glow of candlelight. Some brought music. We listened with heavy-lidded eyes, smoky incense filling our nostrils, hearts beating, thoughts swept away by the seductive notes. At times we huddled silently in secret fear thrilling to the suspense of haunting cinema. We brewed drinks that simulated blood, collected coins in a skeleton skull, partook of food that had been blessed in dark ritual.

For them, it was mere fantasy; for me--fantasy fulfilled. I knew their love for creatures of the dark, for tales of shed blood, could be veined to deeper purpose. I alone, the virgin prophetess, could take them to the haunts of their dreams.

Then one night, Evan came. Evan of the "real" world. How she discovered us, I don't know. It had been months since we displayed our

poster at a certain downtown theatre of horror and the macabre. We had decided our numbers were enough; those wishing to join us in the future would have to hear by word of mouth. We would thus retain our elitism. It lent a sense of codeship, an aura of mystery.

Mathilde, ever the gracious hostess, could not be so improper as to refuse the visitor entry. That was not in Mathilde's New Orleanian upbringing, nor in her charming Southern character. So Evan came into our midst and I knew she came to destroy. She smelled of the sweet deceit of self-righteousness.

She wore skirts, baggy and loose. Her blouses, too, were modest, and her brown hair, free of fancy styling, was also modestly pinned back with unadorned clips. Her eyes watched from behind simply-framed glasses, seeing much more than the group guessed she did. She had come, not to join, but to observe, and though the group vaguely sensed her strangeness, I alone understood her threat.

But how could I tell them without revealing myself? They would take my panic for insecurity. Already they disbelieved some of my stories when I forgot myself and told too much. They fancied themselves humoring an imaginative teen. I knew of their doubts, but consoled myself that my proof, once presented, would carry all the more conviction.

Now I wish I had not waited. Now I wish I had warned them and let them think me disturbed.

At each meeting she attended, Evan glared at the walls from the corners of her eyes. It seemed she sat absorbing the history--and nimbus--hidden in them, radiating from them. Once she stood in Mathilde's grand foyer, mesmerized by a painting of Dorothy of Oz. Flanked by the Tin Man, Scarecrow, and Lion, Dorothy cuddled Toto in her arms and smiled winsomely from the oiled canvas, her dark braids neatly parted, bound in blue ribbons.

Turning to a waiting Mathilde, Evan whispered, "Have you looked into her eyes? Dorothy's eyes?"

Mathilde shrugged non-committally. Evan stared at her, the gaze piercing, and looked back at the painting. "There's something wicked about them. They're so . . . dark." She took a step back. "They gleam! Like--knives, or . . . teeth."

Mathilde glanced at me, incredulous. She smiled, but I noticed she swallowed--nervously, I thought--before leading Evan by the elbow into the meeting room.

I tried to find out what I could about Evan's personal life, but it was difficult. I felt so uneasy talking to her. I was afraid she somehow knew of my difference from the others. I found out she worked part-time at two jobs: a pharmacy during the day and a health food store evenings. It seemed such a contradiction to me.

"I've thought about becoming an herbalist," she explained. "You see, I can't stand pain. The very thought of pain tortures me. When I was a little girl, television commercials terrified me. They would show a woman's face twisted in pain. Her forehead would be full of these awful furrowed lines. She would press her fingers to her temples and the background sound effects



# House Carfax

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would pound and pulse and swell--without mercy, relentless, amplifying! And I would tense up and start crying and yelling for somebody to please give her something! Stop her pain!"

She was breathless after this admission.

And my own heart was racing.

"How could they show that on television? How could they be that cruel?"

I wanted to get away from her. I'm sensitive too, more sensitive to emotion than even she. I felt her distress, wringing my own aura in pining, invisible waves. As eerie as she was, the girl was right. I would never again see a television commercial for headache pain relief without shivering, and remembering Evan.

She was studying pharmaceuticals, she told me later, when she'd gotten back on the track of our conversation, so that she could understand the synthetic remedies and replace them with herbal ones. She felt that herbs represented the natural order of things and synthetic medicines, which upset the natural balance, should be "oppressed".

Her quizzical stare made me shudder.

I became upset when she brought a camera to the meeting to photograph us. In particular, she seemed obsessed with me. I had come dressed extravagantly that night in a black tux and white ruffled shirt. My black hair, naturally curly and thick, I had combed back so that it haloed my face in a wiry, midnight cloud. I had chalked my face, too, overdramatizing my paleness so it appeared theatrical, not the natural pallor it truly was. My huge gray-green eyes were circled in breathtaking makeup, my raven brows brushed handsomely to an upward stroke. But it was the lips of which I felt most proud, blooded red around my perfect milky teeth. And if my self descriptions ring of conceit, I must defend and declare that I am without exaggeration a most rare and beautiful creature.

Evan was there when I arrived, and I regretted immediately my elaborate costume. My mood of uncontained relish drained. She would watch me closely tonight, perhaps seeing in that psychic-tainted vision of hers the truth behind my ensemble.

The group would not be so aware. They would delight, as usual, in my tendency to "create atmosphere", especially with the donning of such authentic dress in the style of the Nosferatu. But this one, with her trembling, heightened gift for seeing beyond walls and oil, into the soul, would surely sense my immortal self.

I sat with dis-ease beside Ramona, who shrieked in appreciation of my serious and dignified manner. Ramona shrieked at everything, and I usually enjoyed her natural theatrics of self expression. But tonight my mood was real, and so her loud boasting annoyed me.

When I attempted to discreetly convey to her my suspicions of Evan's motives, Ramona embarrassed me, laughing at and exaggerating my concerns--to the tune of the Twilight Zone theme. And then she was distracted by urgent orders from Mathilde to shut off the lights.

I watched them in those expectant moments before our evening began: Tomas and RV, arguing over a clipping on Alan Moore's Swampthing. Giuseppe and Brooks discussing a book review which Brooks had had

published in one of Giuseppe's small press issues. Jacob and Pietro in earnest conversation over the Hitchcock movie we would view tonight. And Mathilde, purple and gold Mardi Gras beads looped around her neck, hurrying to light candles and situate the incense sticks where they would not be too overpowering.

They didn't even realize!

Mathilde rattled the club's set of dried owl and muskrat bones to commence the gathering. She had brought back the bones from a bayou village south of the Port of Orleans. The fishermen there trapped for fur during the winter, Mathilde told us, and hunted birds as a matter of course. She said too that the bones had been blessed by a Filipino witchdoctor. I believed her.

Perhaps that was my one personal weakness. I believed. And I took the opportunity to again, later that night, restate my fears of Evan's intentions. She had interrupted the movie just before the notorious shower scene, clapping her hands over first eyes, then ears as the music crescendoed, finally tripping her way out of the den. She would lock herself in Mathilde's guest bath until the scene was well over, who knows, maybe reciting litanies against the evil inherent in the surrounding wallpaper.

No amount of persuasions could sway them. Pietro accused me, with smuggest audacity, of being jealous. Jealous that Evan's strangeness gets more group attention than my own "pretended and self-claimed" weirdness! That stung. As if he had any idea who or what I am! The most I could get was a promise from Mathilde, as hostess and in consideration of all her guests (Mathilde would do for graciousness what she would not do to save her own soul), to prohibit Evan's photographing the group during our gatherings. I could argue no further; they were eager to get on with the movie.

Psycho proved indeed a "testing of the psyche," as Mathilde had announced during the bone rattling. In the movie's closing scene, a fully deranged Norman Bates consoles himself with his vow to not move, not so much as to swat a fly. As Norman lifts his head to the camera, the scene of the car being fished from the lake is superimposed over his features. But in the instant between that scene-switch, the genius of Hitchcock has programmed a riveting special effect, the subliminal power of which has kept psychologists marveling for years.

The test was to be aware of that special effect. I saw it instantly, with terror-chilled emotion. But I was more startled when Giuseppe and Jacob and Tomas claimed to witness it, too. Could human livestock possess such awareness? In the instant before the image of Norman Bates' face melts into the picture of the hoisted, swamp-soaked car, his features first fade into another image: the ghostly pale of a skull. Realization, far from preparing one for understanding the effect, only makes the uneasiness in one's stomach and chest doubly disturbing.

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The camera conflict was resolved but my resentment grew--and not because of Pietro's accusation, though I could tell some of the group were beginning to dwell on that. They seemed to think I was becoming obsessed



with Evan. My resentment grew because she got around me. She didn't bring her camera again, but once, when she got up to seek refuge in the bathroom during another meeting in which something we said or did frightened her, I made an excuse to get up and examine something she'd been writing. It wasn't writing. It was drawing. She had scratched sketches of us--I could see they were of us--our faces all meshed, some twisted, some distorted, with exaggerated angles.

But all of us were kneeling.

I could not contain my alarm.

The sketches, done in blue ink and all the more amazing for the way she'd managed the shadings and line flows with a simple ink pen, were more disturbing than the photography had been: this was personal. With my fine sense for attunement, I knew she had touched me. She had touched us.

I stormed my alarm but I could see it was in vain. They became more convinced than ever that I resented the attention they gave Evan, negative and unflattering as it was; that I was "competing" with her. Of all the outlandish notions! She was demented and because I saw that and they couldn't, they actually accused me of that nonsense! And even more than that, they began to grow annoyed with me.

I could sense my purpose begin to falter. She, the divider, had come and she would ruin every hope I had for drawing the group unto the pleasure of Hades. Oh, the wonders of night I could have shown them! The secrets of darkness I could have imparted! The club meetings would have been a sham in comparison! I know! Because of who I am! And to what had it been lost? Some big-eyed, confused misfit who was allowed to openly spy on us and disrupt our unity.

I grew to hate Evan.

And to distrust her more than that.

I refused to speak to her at the meetings. In fact, I came subdued, often now the target of gentle ridicule over my uneasiness with the stranger in our midst. Imagine! I, the Dark Prophetess, hope of a near-vanished race--the object of parlour banter!

As I said, I loved the group, every one (except Evan, who is not a part of us), but I became pained by the offhandedness with which they treated me, as though I truly were a mere sixteen-year-old in love with the legend of Dracula. I grew torn between revealing myself, thus shocking the truth into them, or concealing my identity in hopes of gradually drawing them to me to learn my ways, to walk the mists of my world. I had dreamed of the night when we would unite in ritual, when I would take each by the hand, and we would share blood, not the phony brews we concocted in make-believe, like children playing at fantasies, but blood, the force of life, the elixir that would carry us on black winds to the glorious immortality of Hades.

And now my dream was fading and I stood with feet in both worlds, knowing not which side to favor. Then Evan struck again, and she decided me.

We were to have another blood-brewing. It was innocent, of course.

Always innocent. And most of the time, not even alcoholic. Virgin Bloody Marys, passionfruit juice dyed with food coloring. And this time, Evan wanted to make the brew for us.

I could not believe the group would allow it. How could they trust her? They wouldn't listen to me, not one of them. In fact, they ignored me almost automatically. As if they knew I would protest as a matter of course. I was furious. But I loved them. I had to save them, though I could expect no understanding on their part. They were choosing between limited boundaries and a great vision, the one world they knew or the universe they could have treaded with me. They did not even know this. I pondered. I brooded. I soul-searched myself. Evan had come to stop me. I knew that. I'd known it when she first gazed into me with that disturbing sight of hers, twisting, turning and uprooting my thoughts like smooth earth ruptured by the plow.

How would she overtake me? I had wondered. Now I knew. She would do it with the brew--with no pain. She couldn't stand pain; nor would she inflict it on others. Consider her approach to herbs. She thought them superior--right--over drugs. So what had she done? She had observed medicines, learned about them so she knew enough to "oppress" them. Had she not done the same to us? She--her world--represented the "natural order" of things, a world without 'deliberate insomnia', without seeking and prying into the stuff of nightmares. We, with our aberrant desires to be affrighted, to explore the world of the dark, we upset the "natural balance." And she had come to study us that she might effectively oppose us. Had she not the perfect means? Medicines and herbs, tasteless, odorless--how much easier could we have made it for her?

I personally called, by telephone, every member of the group before that final meeting. I warned each one, as best I could, without giving myself away, without saying how or why I knew what I knew. Without revealing who I am. The reaction each time was the same: bored disbelief. Some, like Brooks and Jacob and Giuseppe, were genteel enough to be polite. Others, like Tomas and Runningvomit and Ramona were openly scathing in their disbelief. Mathilde imparted the gravest insult of all. "Franceska," she paused hesitantly, and then went on in that musical singsong of hers, "Cher, are you sure you're all right?"

I, who had counted them worthy to breathe the dark breath, could bear no further humiliation.

At Mathilde's that night, they seemed to shun me, all. Mathilde stared at me strangely, and I believe I caught her and Ramona whispering about me. Runningvomit's jokes were not friendly; they were direct assaults on my dignity. Tomas ignored me and the patience of Pietro was strained. Jacob and Giuseppe kept their distance and the smile on Brooks' kind face was pitying.

And Evan, the oppressor in disguise, sat smiling glibly, conversing with no one in her lost, foolish way. How dare they compare us!

The time came, the ceremony came, and she brought out her brew. Sullenly, I refused to drink. The others laughed, coaxed, gave up on me, teased Evan, who beamed rhapsodically. The witch! She thought she had



won. They would soon find the truth.

Mathilde, with her dangling gold earrings, laughed beautifully and lifted her cup. "Tonight! Ah, yes, ce soir! Tonight we join in the blood-sharing ritual. We share a new drink, this one the gift of a guest who tonight becomes one of us! To Evan, and all the keepers of the house!"

The candle flames flickered, incense wafted. Silence as they all gulped.

"And now, we read from tonight's passage!" Mathilde announced. "This one a most macabre prayer whispered from the cavebeds of centuries." She drained her silvered goblet in a toast, drew breath deeply, and began, her husky voice mesmerizing in the silent den. "Do you remember the thing we saw, dear soul, on that gentle summer morning?"

And she gave us Charles Baudelaire's "Carcass" from the year 1857.

It was not at all a lengthy passage. A mere five paragraphs or so. But it was the last, theatricized by Mathilde, which created the silence that followed: "Then, my beauty! Tell the vermin that will eat you with kisses that I have preserved the shape and the divine essence of my decayed love!"

I will always remember Mathilde's face as she lowered the sheet and met the depth of my gaze. She did not move, but the beads swathed over her chest caught the candlelight as she breathed. Her dark forehead glistened, shiny, smooth, satiny in the waxy glow. Her slim brown hands clasped reverently in front of her, delicately holding that sheet of papyrus. She stood swaying, a woman on the brink. Having just read of death, having tasted its rotting flavor in Baudelaire's words of poisonous decay, she must have been aware of its presence sinking into the hollow of her posh den.

Her dark misty eyes, possessed with a burning insight inherited from the dark spirituality of her culture, searched mine, as though Evan's drink had heightened her senses so that they groped for a target on which to focus. The intensity in her eyes said, Why, Franceska? and a small beautiful scowl marred her puzzled face. Why then did she not look to Evan?

Alarm blocked my throat. I am much, much too sensitive (because of who and what I am, one must remember) and I could not withstand Mathilde's probing. Her mind was so . . . active-- alive! It is not often the human cattle can grip with such sheer, delicate . . . insight. Their minds are most often blocked to this special sensitivity, as were the minds of the others that night.

It was Ramona who leaned forward in her trademark intensity. "Are you all right?"

Mathilde tore her gaze away from me, shook her head, and seemed to recover herself. She forced one of her demure, posturely smiles, but I did see the perspiration beading on her temples. "Forgive me, cher. I drank too quickly." She was herself again, composed, sure. But her dark eyes darted back to me uneasily. Did she understand now my resistance to Evan?

I felt her moment of searching intensity grow weak and I relaxed. She was powerless to probe me now.

"There is a custom in New Orleans," Mathilde smiled, her voice purring. I could imagine the blood, musical in the chords of her neck, carrying warm currents that echoed faintly, that must pulse with the rhythm of her tone.

Her blood would be so sweet, so rich! I have heard that some Creoles in New Orleans have blood types yet uncategorized by modern medicine. What a curious, stirring mixture that must be! How sharp and hot and sweet it must taste!

"It is, of course, a custom of our most revelous holiday. The Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday."

We listened to her, enraptured. Perhaps it was the liquor prepared by Evan, perhaps it was the magnetism of Mathilde, with her faraway look, her soft creamy skin against the hues of her silk blouse and multi-colored skirt and the dreamy charismatic tone of her voice, an ancient one passing down storytales to the eager listening ears of children holding their breaths in anticipation of the dreadful thrilling mysteries to be revealed.

"Every Mardi Gras, the families make a King Cake. It's like one big cinnamon roll, only it is covered in icing and dusted with sugar tinted purple and green and gold--the Mardi Gras colors. Inside the cake is baked a small plastic baby doll. Some say it represents the Christ child. Anyway, *mes chez amis*," she smiled again, beautifully. When she said "*mes chez amis*", she meant just that. My dear friends. Her dear, dear friends. All of us (except, I am sure, Evan). "Anyway, the cake is cut and served and no one knows who will get the piece with that little figurine. But when they do--" Her face seemed to glow. "Ah, *mon dieu*, the stories I have heard about this one thing!"

"Tell us!" From Ramona, bursting with impatience.

Mathilde shook her head. "It's nothing. I'm afraid I've made the story more than it is. Let's just say the person who gets the figurine could be very lucky or extremely unfortunate. Some believe the doll heralds a new birth. Others, simply that the person getting this *jujus* will have the headache of hosting the Mardi Gras party next year. Who knows?" She laughed, and continued.

"Tonight, I have, er, amended the tradition for our purposes. I've made us this instead." She stepped down to the magnificent rose quartz table welled into the center of the sunken den. Its smooth polished surface, so like fine marble, revealed a cutaway of the quartz's deep-hued interior.

Sitting on the miniature table was a covered cake dish on a rectangular linen napkin. Mathilde stooped, her colorful skirt swishing, and carefully raised the cover.

I watched the reactions on their faces. They were fascinated. And then they were all commenting at once, except for me, silent, watching them, and Mathilde, silent, watching me.

It was a skull cake, in the familiar upside-down-pear shape. Frothed in a white whipped creme, an X-shaped crack marked the forehead and below that, hollowed dark sockets stared above sinister skull teeth, all painted in the blue-black stain of food coloring. A singular trickle of red dripped from



one corner of the mouth.

"There is another tale of superstition I have not yet told you." Mathilde knelt before the cake and picked up an . . . instrument. It was sharper than a knife--a silver blade. She handled it with a glitter in her eye. She moved it swiftly through the cake. Beneath the whipped creme, ripe strawberries bled in a rich, runny syrup.

She cut out the first piece onto a saucer and held the saucer with both hands. "There are superstitions that offerings must be made," she whispered. "That sacrifices of food and drink must be left." Then abruptly she shook her head. "But those are not the tales of which I speak. The one of which I am thinking--" she paused. She seemed--woozy. "In the fishing village of Grand Isle my great-grandfather was a priest." A smile, forgiving and sad. "I still use that word when I explain to others. Or sometimes I say he was a doctor. Both are true, but when I use the real word, his word, all other words are nothing but grand lies. He was a sorcier.

"I learned from this old man, who told me our bloods carried powerful links, his and mine. He . . . showed me many things." She smiled at us with glassy eyes. They were huge, and crying. "Why do I tell you this tonight? Because tonight I feel things I have not felt since I last apprenticed as a child priestess. And perhaps, also, because I have drunk too much of Evan's fair wine.

"There are many of us with secrets here tonight. There are ways to reveal secrets. The elixir is one way. The trinket hidden in this cake is another. I told you some of the superstitions associated with this tradition. But I did not tell you some of the darker ones. That the act itself is a cousin of the ancient practice of casting lots. That in the old, old days, this custom decided matters of grave fate and fortune. It was by no means a parlour game. The spoils and riches of defeated kings have been divided by the falling of lots. The garments of Jesus Christ himself as he hung dying on the cross were gambled for by the casting of lots. Men--and women--have gone to their deaths by it. You see, like foolish children we play deadly games whose power we are too ignorant, too joyeux to understand.

"Vieillard--as they called my great-grandfather--he was so old, his name was forgotten--revealed deeper, more astounding secrets of this business of drawing for lots. Like all other young people, I at first doubted. But I saw Vieillard make the cakes himself and with his own hands beat into the mix knobs of wax unmolded or bits of bone unpieced. I saw with my own eyes later, when the cake was cut and the pieces served . . . I saw--"

Abruptly she looked at each of us. "Kneel here, all of you. I will prove what I am saying." She swallowed the dregs of Evan's wine; even kneeling, she nearly swooned.

I knelt without hesitation but I sensed the uneasiness of the others. Mathilde cut us each a piece of cake, dividing the entire skull as evenly into ten as possible.

"I myself put a tiny unformed ball of wax into this biscuit. I recited over it the incantations and invocations taught me by my great grandfather. This is not the first time I have done this. Just the first time in a long, long while. And now I tell you the secret most astounding and terrifying. I have seen

similar little balls of wax and unbound pieces of bone poured into the mix without conceived fashioning. And I have seen that same round of wax and splinter of bones when the cake is cut. I have seen the look on the face of the person who finds the trinket in his piece of pastry. The wax forms into a shape by itself. And the bones make a formation of their own accord."

I did not like this. Chills crawled along my back, raised the hairs on my arm.

"I swear to you all, whatever you find, to whomever finds it, I have not shaped or influenced the thing."

Kneeling, saucers in hand, faces suddenly frightened, we all waited. In the faroff back of my mind, a blue-inked drawing of contorted faces tried to project itself but all my concentration was on the group. Though no one gave the command, they all, at a cue from Ramona, downed the last of their cups as though in a final fatal toast. To the powers that be. A second

hesitation followed the drinking--the uncertainty of eating. Taking a deep breath, Ramona cut into her cake determinedly and stuffed a forkful into her mouth. Swiftly the others followed suit, all in a hurry now to not be the last. Why is it no one ever wants to be first to take the risk nor last to take the fall?

I was last. And I ate cautiously, feeling around in the cake when I cut it with my fork, letting my saliva melt the sweetness before I bit in with my teeth and ground them on wax. Nothing. I had only two bites left and I was confident the "trinket" must be in someone else's offering. The last forkful was the bleeding red trickle symbolizing blood. Without conscious effort, I had saved it for last. I bit, relieved that my test was over. Something caught in my tooth. Yielding, but firm. Like biting into a jellybean. And a rancid sharpness curled my tongue.

I caught my breath and for an instant thought about faking it, about going on as though there was nothing wedged in tight against my gums, no nauseating fumes backing in my throat, filling my nostrils. But tangy vileness filled my mouth with sour saliva, making me want to retch. I finally had to spit, I couldn't help it.

All eyes turned to me. I swallowed the bile remaining and, with thumb and forefinger, dislodged a waxy blob from my back teeth.

Mathilde shrieked when she saw it and back away from me, crossing herself and beginning to pray in rapid French.

"What does it mean?" Ramona urged.

I nearly fainted, such a trembling overpowered me. "This is a joke."

"No!" Mathilde blurted. The group froze, not knowing whether to fear her or me. Her mesmerized eyes blinked from me to the tiny skull--for that was the shape of the figurine I had picked from my teeth.

"It means many things." Her gaze bore into me with knowledge. "All the things we dread. The hand of death. The mind, bereft of reason. Ultimate truth, however dark . . ."

Without warning she lurched at the knife she had used on the cake. Its blade gleamed silver in the dim candlelight. I started, and several others gasped. Where there had been crumbs of cake and streaks of white whipped creme, dark blood now flowed in a wet stain.



The knowledge in her eyes was for me only. Incredibly, she withdrew the knife from between her breasts where she had fallen on the blade and buried it nearly to the hilt. She laid the weapon, covered with her blood, upon the quartz table. Her body slumped.

Evan screamed once and there was a silence and then she began screaming again and hugging herself, trembling into the couch.

Their eyes pinned me with fear, with loathing.

"Don't look at me!" I denied (too soon). "It's her" I saluted an arm at Evan.

She was weeping. "There is a man," she sobbed, "who lives in my living room. He is small, but powerful." She rocked herself and wept harder. "I am the only one . . . who can see him. He likes to come out--out from under the carpeting, out from behind the walls--at night. He threatens me. He swears he'll fill me with pain until I lose my mind."

I felt her eerie despair, felt its smothering madness twist and wreath around me. I shook my head to clear dizziness, then forced myself to breathe, to disentangle myself from her silent-shrieking panic.

"Last night he told me he would come for me. I think he has. And now . . . I know his . . . I know his name." She stood up, wavering. She took a step, then clutched at her stomach. Doubling over, she gagged. No one moved.

"His name is . . . Dauthi," she gasped.

"Death," I whispered.

She retched and gagged again, her tongue rippling with spasms. Then she did puke, a fetid, steamy porridge showering from her throat, down her front and into her blouse, puddling the carpet. It broke from her nostrils, too, in coughing spray, spilling her glasses from her nose.

"Oh, my God!" Ramona whispered, but no one moved.

It occurred to me that Evan might vomit the poison out of her system and save herself, but within seconds she had choked to death on her own soured excrement, with all of them watching helplessly.

I had not lusted for her blood, but I shuddered at the thought of so much wasted nourishment. And I had been so long deprived.

"What's going on!" Ramona demanded sharply. "Someone--for God's sake--call an ambulance!"

I bowed, and flared my cape, arresting attention and motion. It was my time at last. "You want to know?" I laughed shrilly. "All right, you'll know." Know . . . know . . . I let my voice whisper-echo, its distortion ringing in their eardrums. The echo carried a supernatural steeliness.

"Where the fuck did that come from?" Tomas had the presence of mind to cloak his fear with machoism, but it ran from the others in rank, sweaty fumes. I wanted to choke on it, but overpowered the urge by switching focus to my power.

"Somebody, quick! Find the phone!"

My heart pounded. It paced Ramona's heart, beating fright, beating furious. Her instinct shivered, sharp as her fear, and the ripeness of her dawning realizations filled me. Oh, God--her feelings!

I swam in disorientation, hearing finally what she'd said. (It was so

impossible to concentrate!) "NO! No phones!" I snarled.

I pressed them with my command, fighting for focus, straining to echo their minds with my single thought. The hypnosis, however, was not complete. They were seven, and I, only one. And their feelings--oh! it was incredible to have to bear. Searing and sensuous at once! Excruciating divinity! But I must at least keep them in this room, at the center--and the mercy--of my power.

I struggled to concentrate, pushed and calmed alternately, pushed and calmed. Staring unseeingly beyond them, my eyes called up around us a fence of black web clinging and vining the walls. It sealed the doorways, a thick ropery web, tarry with black.

I don't know that they saw the web, but I sensed that they realized they were somehow restrained from leaving here, refrained from acting against my will.

But the task of nullifying all their thoughts simultaneously--seven of them!--taxed me. I knew I should act quickly.

I relaxed my force, and the relief that watered through my bones was sweet. My nerves contracted and flexed with the letup in tension. I knew I must pace myself. Already, I was soaked in perspiration and my fingertips trembled. Never had I so tested my power! But I kept the outline of the web strong in my mind, the picture so strong that the web cast a shadow. I believe Runningvomit must have seen that shadow. He stared, mesmerized.

But no one stirred. Then, quite reverently, Jacob and Giuseppe huddled closer to Ramona, who cradled Mathilde's slumped unconscious body. Brooks found a place behind Jacob and Giuseppe and Pietro behind him. Runningvomit and Tomas exchanged glances. Instinct! Look at their instinct! They all moved closer to each other--in! Moving in.

Fight me, would they? They wouldn't dare. Then a tiny icy fright pricked at me. Surely they could not know the protection of the closed circle! Only Mathilde would know that. And . . . seven of them. The Number of Seven! I must act!

"Runningvomit," I shrilled. "What do you see?"

He blinked, and I felt his confusion rise. The drink had affected him strongly. His slight build and light weight could not have helped.

"Don't answer her!" Ramona snapped.

I cursed myself. I had diverted my full attention to RV. It was difficult to stay back and forth between them all, guessing at the lines of tension, guessing at who might attempt to act and would have to be repressed. Quickly, I seized an opportunity, focusing all of my will. "What is your real name?"

Runningvomit's neck jerked as though a leash on him had been snapped.

"Quick! Tell me! Tell me now!"

Ramona opened her mouth to wail "NO!" but my reaction was fast and all that came out was a soundless "nooo" stretching her mouth in a ghostly rubber-band "o". Her eyes, when they turned to stare at me, petrified, showed her shock.



Runningvomit staggered to his feet, his eyes half-closed. He leaned heavily and took a step towards me. A step outside the circle . . . breaking the band. "My name is--my real name is-- Stanley Bruce. I hate it. It isn't--it isn't even Chinese."

"Runningvomit!" Ramona lurched forward, stumbling herself.

It was too late. I blinded him and Stanley Bruce fell, his head grazing a sharply angled corner of the quartz table. He collapsed on the carpet, going to his death unconscious.

"He is history." I let my teeth gleam at this pun. Runningvomit had not believed in history.

I felt the pain of stretched lips and aching gums. With the smile, I had unconsciously grown my "piercing teeth" and the roots throbbed to sink into the yielding warmth of flesh, to nestle snugly in a punctured human blanket. I remembered what Evan had said about Dorothy's eyes, gleaming wickedly like knives . . . like teeth.

Mustering as much strength as I could, I pushed them to see my teeth as I felt them: long, tapered, smooth as ivory; but sharp to the points, and dead as tusks.

Pietro and Brooks reacted with startled stares, the blood in their faces draining colorless. Pietro, especially, grew extremely white, the blue of his eyes standing out like orbs of blue lightning. I thought his fear magnificent!

"I'll tell you what's going on." It took too much effort to guard the six of them, work on Pietro and Brooks, and maintain the whisper-echo, so I let my voice go normal but kept the tone surreal. "It's time you know who I am, friends." I spat the last word, and could not suppress a hiss. Disdain for them rocked me, it was so strong. But I must bring these emotions to even keel if I were to control at all.

It was Jacob who spoke then, his voice soft, his question the gentlest intrusion on my concentration. "Who are you, Franceska?" The awe in his query made my pride swell.

"I meant to show you," I told him passionately, feeling my disappointment and disillusionment all over again, fresh as the sting of being thwarted by Evan. "To take you with me to the Shadowland of Paradise. You, Jacob! And Giuseppe and Ramona and Tomas. Pietro and Brooks, Runningvomit--all of you."

Tears stung at my lids; I grew furious feeling their heat. "But, no! You prefer the sham of pretense! False blood and stupid stories! I could have courted you all, I could have brought to life the dream of darkness."

Sobs swelled in my throat and I gulped, hurting to swallow them. How deeply their betrayal tore at me, cut me! "But you would not come with me.

You chose instead to play at horror!" The tears and pain bittered me, blinded me. And a great coldness crept into my chest, a great cold hatred for every one of them.

"Well, now you can live your death. Now you can feel the moment--instead of talk about it!"

"What--in God's name--did you DO?" Ramona, standing, rising . . . coming at me. My emotions, her emotions, the dazed shock of Pietro and

Brooks--my head spinning, dizziness nauseating me . . .

She was on me before I could recover, shaking me, choking me, calling me insane. I gasped for air, clawed at the blur of her features.

She was destroying me! The image of the black web faded from my sight, shrinking into a receding dot. Pietro and Brooks were far, far away, out of reach of my touch, but I had vanquished them, I knew. Even now, the poison would be rushing to fill every tiny vein. But the thought was small victory.

My knees buckled weakly, Ramona falling on top me, clutching at my throat. And my teeth! My beautiful polished fangs! I felt the marrow in them grow human-soft, felt the spasm of roots contracting.

I screamed and punched Ramona violently in the face.

She staggered back, stunned.

"You're too late! You'll all die!" The room, the den, vaulted ceiling--all spun crazily.

"The bitch's poisoned us! She's fucking poisoned us all!" Madness in Tomas, the madness that had touched Evan, perhaps even now gripping me; but true as his decree was, there was too much haziness in my head for me to . . . feel him. But I could feel Pietro and Brooks, the pinpoints of their lives vanishing in death.

Tomas and Jacob and Giuseppe advanced stealthily, like-- wolves from a mist! Through the haziness, I squinted to see them, as I had strained to see them in another place. I had been in this time! They had stalked me, before!

My heart lurched. In the Old Country! Before I . . . before I was real. On the moors I had fled, wolves, dogs and two-legged beasts in pursuit.

I watched them come, shoulders stooped, hands gnarled, faces twisted--always the same. Their awareness was as keen as mine! (Yes, they had spotted the Hitchcock effect, hadn't they?)

And they were wolves from a mist!

With a swift rushing in my ears, I found Mathilde's silver knife.

My body did something then (I think it was then) something instinctive, something strange. I found myself looking down on Ramona, my vision framed to a small slant. Her body lay still, her throat bled a dark river. The wolves must have torn her, they must have! It could not be me, I am real.

My gaze shifted. One of the wolves howled with the pain of the silver blade in his chest which I had embedded there.. The other two circled me with menace--surely they could not touch me now, I must be real again!--I fluttered against the ceiling, trapped, in a panic. I am real, I chanted, I am real, I am real, I am all. One of them ripped me with a yellow claw.

.....

There used to be nine of us. Now there's just me, though I don't mind. Sometimes loneliness is a comfort. It's when I feel the presence of others that I grow uneasy, on the nights when the moon is full. I am filthy and my fur is as caked and dried as blood scabs. Even with chiropterous vision, I feel blind, except at night. Saddest of all, I, who was once beautiful, am now



grotesquely disfigured. I have a hand where the one wolf (Tomas, I think), tore at my wing, for a fatal moment making me unreal. This imbalance makes the rest of my body suffer but in a way it is a blessing, for I can write down my words, though they are scrawled in blood, and study them while I hold on to my sanity. I must rediscover how my body worked its miracle on the night of my escape, and then perhaps I can be wholly real again.

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## MOVIE REVIEWS . . . AND REFUSE

by Janadale Sylve-Wickersham

### THE SERPENT AND THE RAINBOW

This film is about an American doctor in search of a rare mysterious Haitian drug, sought after in the States for medicinal purposes and used in its native country in the rituals of black-magic voodooism. It's a cinematic experience actually worthy of being tagged "entertainment."

Seething with dark undertones and rich with cultural overtones, the story lures the viewer to the Haitian world of underground politics, powerful religion, and frightening beliefs in the supernatural. The faultless pace and teasing plot deliver a promise of breathless intrigue . . . and manage to live up to viewer expectations. No dolls-and-pins playstuff here, mon amis.

But do be careful that no strange dust gets in your eye . . .

## Horror Match Test

OK GANG! Now's your chance to prove you know as much as you think you do! Just pair up the 30 descriptions with 30 names of authors, characters, directors, titles, etc. The names list has three throwaways - so don't expect an even match!

30 DESCRIPTIONS TO MATCH AGAINST 33 NAMES - 3 THROWAWAYS

### DESCRIPTIONS

1. Pioneered radio horror plays
2. Name of "bad" New Orleans vampire, from George R. R. Martin
3. Cult horror actress, last seen in a bathtub
4. Talented R. I. recluse
5. Hunted vampires in Las Vegas
6. Royal Jelly
7. English dwelling of the Count
8. Bug who eats your brain if you don't kill for it
9. The Demon Barber of Fleet Street
10. "Why, he wouldn't hurt a fly."
11. Oldest U.S. publisher of horror books
12. Writer of "scariest 20 minutes ever on TV," PREY
13. Found shortcut to eternal life
14. Director of original movie that inspired "Throw Momma From the Train"
15. Author of "Martian Chronicles"
16. Old cult producer known for cats and leopards
17. Best reason not to pick up hitchhikers
18. Name of "good" New Orleans vampire, from George R. R. Martin
19. Directed movie with scene of mother eating babies' placentas
20. Good doppleganger story
21. Story pulled from print for being "too horrible" in 1900; reprinted in 1913
22. Editor/writer who first encouraged Lovecraft
23. Author of "War Of The Worlds"
24. "Help me, help me"
25. Directed Lugosi's DRACULA
26. Credited for finding and reprinting many "lost" horror stories
27. Movie pulled from distribution for being "too effective" in 1912; reissued in 1970's
28. Walked up the stairs and met Mrs. Bates coming down
29. The Red Dragon
30. Dead And Buried - Wrote the novel from the movie



# House Carfax

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- A. ARKHAM HOUSE
- B. ARBOGAST
- C. AUGUST DERLETH
- D. ALFRED HITCHCOCK- SAM MOSKOWITZ-HUGH LAMB (all one choice)
- E. ALFRED HITCHCOCK
- F. ARCH OBHLER
- G. BARBARA STEELE
- H. CHELSEA QUINN YARBOROUGH
- I. CARFAX ABBEY
- J. CLIVE BARKER
- K. DAVID CRONENBERG
- L. DOLARHYDE
- M. ENOCH
- N. THE FLY
- O. FISHHEAD
- P. FREAKS
- Q. H.P. LOVECRAFT
- R. H.G. WELLS
- S. JULIAN
- T. JOSHUA
- U. KOLCHAK
- V. MIDNIGHT EXPRESS
- W. MRS. TODD
- X. NORMAN BATES
- Y. ROALD DAHL
- Z. RICHARD MATHESON
- AA. RUTGER HAUER
- BB. RAY BRADBURY
- CC. STEPHEN KING
- DD. SWEENEY TODD
- EE. TOD BROWNING
- FF. VAL LEWTON
- GG. WES CRAVEN

What! You need the answers?

1-F; 2-S (FEVER DREAM); 3-G (THEY CAME FROM WITHIN); 4-Q; 5-U (NIGHT STALKER); 6-Y (short story); 7-I; 8-M (by Robert Bloch); 9-DD; 10-X (PSYCHO); 11-A; 12-Z; 13-W (MRS. TODD'S SHORTCUT by Stephen King); 14-E (STRANGERS ON A TRAIN); 15-BB; 16-FF (THE LEOPARD MAN, CAT PEOPLE); 17-AA (THE HITCHER); 18-T (FEVER DREAM); 19-K (THE BROOD); 20-V (by Alfred Noyce); 21-O (by Irwin S. Cobb); 22-C; 23-R; 24-N (classic final scene of fly-man caught in spider's web); 25-EE; 26-D; 27-P (directed by Tod Browning); 28-B (detective hired by Marion Crane's sister); 29-L (great novel by Thomas Harris); 30-H.

Was it easy? Was it difficult? Let us know - and we'll give you more if this isn't enough!

## THE AMBIVALENT HERO OF MODERN HORROR

by David Van Becker

When the roadshow *Dracula* starring Jeremy Brett played in San Francisco a few years ago, SF Chronicle columnist Herb Caen reported that at the climax of Act I, when the dread Count bent over the virginal Lucy and gave her his first long-awaited vampire kiss, the entire audience gave a great sigh of satisfaction, then laughed in embarrassment. I noticed it was quite different a few weeks later with a matinee audience of junior high kids--with no self-consciousness they cheered loudly at the Count's first bite and just as loudly applauded his death on the fatal stake at the end.

These mixed feelings about what used to be purely evil villains are fairly new in the horror tradition, which formerly polarized good and evil, the usual and the horrible, the everyday rational world and the nightmare. We have ambivalent feelings about the new hero/villains because they are presented as both good and evil, attractive and fearful, pitiful and repulsive. And the heroes themselves are often ambivalent, drawn by both the good and evil sides of their own nature. Of course, there have always been villains with some sympathetic features. We pity the suffering monster, especially in such scenes as when the little girl offers Frankenstein's creature a flower.

Attractiveness in villains is often a mask of evil, like *Dracula's* evening dress and courtly charm. But many of today's heroes would've been villains 30 years ago (ghosts, vampires, werewolves), and many older stories are retold with the villains becoming sympathetic or comic heroes.

These changes are most apparent in soft-core horror films and TV shows of the last few years. They reach for a wider audience and often transform traditional materials into low fantasy with little true horror left at all. Thus in the comic *Love At First Bite*, a still suave but culture-shocked *Dracula* finds true happiness with a kooky New York model. In the TV *Werewolf*, the college-boy hero has infectious werewolf disease, only bites the bad guys (gangsters, murderous rednecks, etc.) and is pursued by the big bad werewolf and a bounty hunter. In TV's *Beauty and the Beast*, a cat-man prince is doomed to rescue the heroine every week but is unable to marry her because of his genetic defect. And, of course, *Teen Wolf* with Michael Fox.

But the ambivalent hero isn't confined to soft-pop horror. In many films and novels in the main horror/gothic tradition, the hero/villain, while true to type as monstrous or possessed, is still at least partly a sympathetic character. Thus *Carrie* and Jack Torrance in Stephen King's *Carrie* and *The Shining* are more victims than villains even as they evoke fear in the other characters and the audience. Vampires, too, which were the most loathsome of creatures in Bram Stoker's day (remember *Dracula's* bad breath?), have now become objects of pity, admiration, and lust. Anne Rice's vampire-narrator Louis of *Interview With The Vampire* controls not only the reader's sympathy but also the novel's entire viewpoint. Even more ambivalent is the hero of Rice's later *The Vampire Lestat*. He's now a more sympathetic character, despite the fact that he has no qualms about killing, drives his best friend crazy, and turns his mother into a vampire.



The ambivalent hero seems to be as old as the Gothic/horror tradition itself, which began almost with the modern novel 250 years ago. Gothic novels were part of the first nostalgia fad for things Medieval--"gothick" architecture, old ballads, and stories with castles, ghosts, and tyrants-- with the fearful and sensitive heroine the only modern feature. These virgin-trapped-in-the-castle stories reflected the war, revolution, and social upheaval of the times, which had little place for women in a rapidly industrializing society.

There were then plenty of reigns of terror, and the central themes of these stories were, as they are today, fear, the return of the dead, and the physical horrors of injury, entrapment, and death. Whatever moral ambivalence these early Gothics had was within the villain or tyrant who imprisoned the heroine: dark, brooding, and cruel in action, he was nonetheless tortured by ghosts and guilty secrets.

Toward the end of Gothic I (1785-1820) we begin to see more clearly the divided soul of the Gothic villain/hero. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has not only an often sympathetic monster abandoned by his maker, but also the scientist/monster rational/emotional split in modern man. But whatever their ambivalence, at the end of these early Gothics, the villain must be defeated, the monster killed, if the world is to return to normal.

Around 1890 a second Gothic Revival began in the fearful period before World War I, when many people quite rightly saw that the old systems--of nations, economies, and social classes--were about to change forever. The central work of Gothic II was *Dracula*, whose villain was an apt symbol for the menacing evil threatening Europe, where the real bloodletting of war was to begin in less than twenty years. The theme of ambivalence in Gothic II appears mostly in the susceptibility of heroes to evil: even Jonathan and Mina Harker become *Dracula's* victims for a time, and the weak and frivolous Lucy is turned into a sexy, powerful vampire.

The one clear example of the ambivalent hero in Gothic II is Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, but the either-or hero is doomed when the evil side gets the upper hand. In all the cases so far, the issues are resolved in favor of traditional morality.

The third Gothic Revival, which has been going on since the early 60's has a wonderful variety, with the older types continuing along with the new ambivalent hero stories. The female Gothic of Gothic I is still going strong, as we see in the novels of Victoria Holt and others. The world-threatening monsters of Gothic II may still be the most popular, showing up in such stories as *King's Salem's Lot* and even, by stretching the definition a bit, in all the *Halloween*, *nightmare*, and *chainsaw* films.

But Gothic III is basically different, because its hero/villain is much closer to the audience, most tellingly when the hero(ine) is suspended between the vague moral guidelines of everyday life and the evil beyond the grave. So Rosemary's Baby begins with the nice young couple getting drawn into an evil situation, but halfway through we know the husband has become part of the conspiracy, and at the end the heroine, her opposition to Satan overcome by mother love, accepts her role of the unvirgin (rose) Mary, mother of the newborn Devil incarnate. Another example of a moral turnabout is Stewart's

The Mephisto Waltz, in which a wife performs a copy-cat Satanic soul-switch to follow her ambitious husband (played in the film by Alan Alda). Moral reversal at the end of a horror story may mark the beginning of Gothic III. The earliest example I've found of this "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" ethic is Jack Williamson's novel *Darker Than You Think* (1948). In this story a young reporter investigating the death of a scientist friend discovers a conspiracy of dream-dimensional bestial powers. And for over half the book this standard world-threat plot continues, until our hero is faced with either certain death or life as a powerful werebeast with a sexy wereleopard--the other form of a beautiful woman he thought was on his side. In our age of convenience ethics, who could resist? The novel ends with the world well won for the new beasts, and lost for ordinary humans.

Of course there've been plenty of stories in every age where the bad guys win, but the ambivalent fictions of Gothic III blur the traditional distinction between good and evil, and seem to write their moral codes to suit their own vision or the convenience of their character. This subjective ethic seems especially true in the new vampire stories, such as those by Anne Rice and Chelsea Quinn Yarboro. Yarboro's historical vampire hero drinks only the blood of evildoers, defends the weak against the villains, and behaves in general like the hero of a romantic historical novel--but with the power and immortality of his species. Rice's vampires kill a lot of people, including the innocent, but it doesn't seem to be a moral problem (except for the scrupulous Louis), for these are obviously superior creatures.

The new breed of vampires is also able to avoid many of their traditional difficulties, for most can stay awake in the daytime and have no problems with running water, crucifixes, mirrors, and other old-fashioned anti-vampire measures. Admiration for the vampire seems to be a hallmark of all contemporary stories, even when the protagonists are judged as evil or dangerous, as in *The Hunger*, *Vampire Junction*, and *The Vampire Tapes*. Like the gods of ancient myth, many of these vamps have beauty, power, and immortality, and some can even have "normal" sex.

What's really different about the modern hero/villains of horror is that beneath their peculiarity or monstrosity they are much like us. The heroine in Peter Beagle's "Lila the Werewolf" is an ordinary girl who happens to have what I can only call menstrual lycanthropy--as she explains her transformation, "First day, cramps; second day, this." Anne Rice's vampire Louis is lonely, worries about killing people, and has a compulsion to confess. Even a devil like the tempter in *The Witches of Eastwick* can be charming and clever, able to be trapped by his human weaknesses.

This humanness in the new heroes of horror is the source of their moral ambivalence, the cause of our ambivalent reactions to them. As Pogo the Possum in Walt Kelly's old comic strip said, "We have met the enemy, and he is us."

In a general sense, the Gothic III stories do reflect today's morality. It's harder and harder to tell good guys from bad in the global village. Despite our noble aims, we all belong to a civilization which has given holocaust several new meanings in this century, and we participate in the exploitation of the Third World and the destruction of the environment every time we drink South



American coffee from a styrofoam cup. We are all somebody's vampires.

But some Gothic III stories tell us we can choose not to be a have-it-all-now-and-forever vampire, whose life is like a coked-out, orgiastic snuff film. The heroine of Strieber's *The Hunger* rejects her transformation and the master-vampire: better the living tomb than the killing life.

Most of us are not exploiters, sadists, or murderers--except in our nightmares or maybe in our fantasies. On a deeper level the stories of ambivalent heroes of horror are the stuff of our dreams, made safe for our experience. We learn from them that we now fear not only that we'll be violated, devoured, dragged down by the dead hand of the past, but that we ourselves have some of the hostility and destructiveness that are so large a part of modern life.

The hand of the skeleton is our own.

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Films	PE	JS	JSW
Alien <i>Director: Ridley Scott</i>	4.0	3.5	2.5
Aliens <i>Director: James Cameron</i>	3.5	3.0	3.0
Bad Seed <i>Director: Mervyn Leroy</i>	3.0	4.0	4.0
Beetlejuice <i>Director: Tim Burton</i>	3.5	--	1.0
Black Christmas <i>Director: Bob Clark</i>	4.0	3.5	3.0
Carnival of Souls <i>Director: Herk Harvey</i>	2.5	2.5	--
Chud <i>Director: Douglas Cheek</i>	0.5	1.0	0
Dark Night of the Scarecrow <i>Director: Frank DeFelitta</i>	3.5	3.0	2.5
The Hills Have Eyes <i>Director: Wes Craven</i>	2.0	--	1.0
The Kindred <i>Director: Stephen Carpenter</i>	2.5	2.5	2.0
Near Dark <i>Director: Cathryn Bigelow</i>	0.5	3.0	--
Psycho <i>Director: Alfred Hitchcock</i>	4.0	4.0	4.0
Serpent and the Rainbow <i>Director: Wes Craven</i>	--	2.5	2.5
The Seventh Sign <i>Director: Carl Shulz</i>	1.0	1.5	1.5
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre <i>Director: Tobe Hooper</i>	4.0	--	3.5

## Books

The Ceremonies <i>by T.E.D. Klein</i>	--	2.5	--
The Damnation Game <i>by Clive Barker</i>	--	2.0	--
Dark Forces <i>edited by Kirby McCauley</i>	4.0	4.0	--
Halloween Horrors <i>edited by Alan Ryan</i>	3.0	--	--
Headhunter <i>by Michael Slade</i>	3.0	1.5	--
The House Next Door <i>by Anne Rivers Siddons</i>	2.0	3.5	--
The Hunt <i>by James Howard Kunstler</i>	3.0	--	--
Masques II <i>edited by J.N. Williamson</i>	3.0	--	--
Night Shift <i>by Stephen King</i>	4.0	4.0	4.0
Salem's Lot <i>by Stephen King</i>	4.0	3.0	4.0
Stinger <i>by Robert McCammon</i>	3.0	--	--

4--Excellent 3--Good 2--Average 1--Poor

# House Carfax

JL	CB	BR	AJ	JB	TC	ME	JR	Average
3.0	4.0	3.5	2.0	3.0	--	--	4.0	3.27
3.5	2.5	3.5	4.0	4.00	--	--	2.0	3.22
3.5	3.0	--	4.0	--	--	--	--	3.58
--	1.5	3.0	--	--	--	2.0	2.0	2.16
--	--	--	2.5	2.0	--	--	2.0	2.83
1.5	2.0	2.5	--	--	--	--	--	2.20
0.5	1.0	0.5	--	--	--	--	1.0	0.66
3.5	2.5	1.5	3.5	--	--	--	2.5	2.81
1.5	1.0	2.0	--	2.0	--	--	--	1.58
1.5	2.5	0.5	--	2.0	--	--	--	1.92
2.5	0	3.0	--	--	--	0	2.0	1.57
3.5	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.0	--	--	3.0	3.50
2.5	3.0	3.5	3.0	--	--	--	1.5	2.64
1.5	1.0	0.5	--	2.0	--	--	2.5	1.38
2.5	0.5	4.0	--	--	--	3.0	2.5	2.86

--	1.5	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.00
--	--	2.0	--	--	--	--	--	2.00
--	3.0	--	--	--	--	--	--	3.67
--	2.5	2.5	2.5	--	--	--	--	2.63
2.5	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.33
--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.75
2.0	1.5	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.17
--	--	3.0	--	--	--	--	--	3.00
2.5	4.0	4.0	2.5	--	--	--	3.0	3.50
3.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	--	--	--	3.5	3.56
--	--	--	--	--	--	4.0	--	3.50

## The Reviewers:

PE--Peter Enfantino, JS--Joan C. Schramm, JSW--Janadale Sylve-Wickersham, JL--Joe Lopez, CB--Cliff Brooks, BR--Bruce Runningvomit, AJ--Amy Jackson, JB--Jack Boren, TC--Thorn Carnell, ME--Margaret Enfantino, JR--Jeff Radt.







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